

## My Backcountry 2002

When I started Backcountry I had only vague notions of what I had gotten myself into. As I had already been a corpsmember in the CCC [California Conservation Corps] for a year, I understood the basic work and tasks that I would perform in the coming months. I knew that I would be living in a tent and living with a dozen strangers. That is about all I knew. Now that it is over, I have realized how much more there was to my Backcountry.

On our first day on the trail we hiked four miles one way and on the way home I wondered what the hell I had gotten myself into. I also decided that there was no way I could do it. On the second day I cried all the way back to camp because I had bubbling blisters on my feet. Now, I look back and, having made it through, I wonder what changed.

In the beginning my crew was sixteen eager individuals of varying race, creed, age, and gender. From as far away as New York and as near as Chico [CA], we came to experience the Backcountry. Five and a half months in the woods with nothing more than hard work and each other. We emerged from the woods with eleven of us remaining. Together we faced the worst of everything; the work, the woods, the weather and each other. We struggled with ourselves, our environment and each other. Every day we faced new challenges together. We are now eleven of the strongest, most committed people you may ever know. We walk away strong of mind and body and committed to each other. We stand together, able to accomplish what few could.

The Backcountry Trails Program is a national treasure. In the Backcountry we learn the true meaning of hard work. We understand the real meaning of, "A day's work for a day's wages". We have developed an understanding of community and how to treat your fellow people and coworkers.

I could write about the hundreds of miles we've hiked, the extensive stone structures we've built or the long hours of strenuous labor, but these are not the most important aspects of Backcountry. The most exciting and remarkable part of Backcountry is the positive change it promotes in its participants. In a society based on consumerism and material goods, we have learned what truly defines us when our possessions are left behind. We have come to embody the values that this country was built on; hard work, self sacrifice for the betterment of the community and dedication to a cause worth fighting for: our future and our environment.

Melissa Sutton, Yosemite I / Trinity Alps Crew, 2002